

News
From _____

CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

For Immediate Release
February 11, 1977

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Washington D.C. --- U.S. Representative Nick Rahall (D-4th), called on Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams, to not only continue the AMTRAK Mountaineer Route, but to "improve it."

In a letter initiated by Rahall and signed by the three other members of the West Virginia Congressional Delegation, it was charged that AMTRAK's "experimental" service, "has been to just operate a rather ordinary or below average train and see how many people would go down to the depot by accident and try it out," the Congressmen said.

A decision to continue the Mountaineer Route, which travels from Norfolk to Cincinnati, with stops in Bluefield, Williamson, Welch and Huntington, is expected soon. The line has been temporarily shut-down since late January, due to the cold weather and lack of proper equipment.

Rahall and the others outlined four suggestions to improve the Mountaineer:

1. Continue the line for at least one year, so that improvements can be made.
2. Service should be properly operated according to a comprehensive market-development plan.
3. AMTRAK should be obligated to operate the line with its new and more-reliable Amfleet equipment.
4. The Mountaineer Line should originate in Washington rather than Norfolk.

Rahall stated, "I and the residents of the Southern tier counties of West Virginia would of course prefer a continuation of the present service to an outright discontinuance." He went on to say, "I believe what I am suggesting here is a reasonable middle course."

In late January, Congressman Rahall wrote Mr. Bruce O. Pike, Vice President for Government Affairs of AMTRAK, urging the continuation of the Mountaineer Line.

Congressman Rahall said, "I am confident that Secretary Adams will give our proposals extensive consideration. Just last weekend on a television interview, the Secretary expressed his desire to keep railroads in operation because our long-term transportation needs will require a good rail system."

"The Mountaineer Route would fit into this category, since our area is deficient in other means of transportation," the Congressman concluded.

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

February 10, 1977

Honorable Brock Adams
Secretary of Transportation
400 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Various city officials of my district have advised me that a decision by you may be made shortly concerning the future of Amtrak's "Mountaineer" passenger train service. Our concern is not only that this service be continued, but that it be improved.

By March 27 the decision is supposed to be made whether the Mountaineer, which serves an area deficient in other means of transportation, is to become part of Amtrak's "Basic System" or whether it is to be discontinued. This experimental service was to be operated for two years between Norfolk and Cincinnati and then evaluated. March 27 is the second anniversary date.

Unfortunately, the experiment has been compromised. As of this writing, the train is not operating at all. Service has been "temporarily annulled until further notice" because of Amtrak's equipment shortage, in part caused by bad weather in the Midwest. While the trains were running they were operated with old equipment and without regular advertising and promotion. Trains have been often late, and

in many cases operated without sufficient capacity. From observing the first year's operation, I can only conclude that Amtrak's idea of an "experimental" service has been to just operate a rather ordinary or below-average train and see how many people would go down to the depot by accident and try it out. I think Congress had a bit more in mind when it established the experimental route provisions.

I would like to offer the following suggestions, which I urge you to adopt:

1) Because the experiment has not been properly operated, I believe it would be a reasonable interpretation of the statute on your part to allow the experiment to be continued for at least one additional year. That is, that your decision at this time be neither to make the train a part of the basic system, nor to discontinue it, until some improvements can be made and the market properly tested. If in your view such a course would require an enabling change in the statute, I pledge my full support, in coordination with the other members of the West Virginia delegation, in the passage of a suitable amendment. However, I am advised that such a course may not be necessary, and that all that may be required is a letter to the Speaker of the House and the President and the Majority Leader of the Senate explaining that the interruption of service has prejudiced a decision as contemplated in the Act.

2) That the service, when it is resumed, be properly operated according to a comprehensive market-development plan that should be required of Amtrak and spelled out in detail. The elements of such an experimental plan would include a firm program for regular advertising and promotion as well as "experiments within the experiment" involving fare or schedule experimentation and possibly a change in route to tap larger markets.

3) Amtrak should be obligated to operate this service with its new and more-reliable Amfleet equipment. Because of the alleged incompatibility of the Amfleet cars with the conventional sleeping cars, a different schedule may be necessary. Alternatively, sleepers could be modified to operate with the Amfleet cars. I am advised that the Amfleet equipment operating on an emergency basis on the James Whitcomb Riley route through Charleston has been very well received although this has meant a curtailment of sleeper service.


4) Strong consideration should be given to originating this service in Washington rather than in Norfolk. Trains could be operated from Washington to Lynchburg, Virginia, thus restoring a local service recently discontinued by the Southern, and from Lynchburg through Roanoke, Bluefield, and Kenova-Catlettsburg to Cincinnati on the present route. The primary travel destinations in my district, which includes Bluefield, Welch, Williamson, and the Huntington-Kenova area, are to Cincinnati and Chicago on the west and to Washington on the Northeast Corridor cities on the east, not to Norfolk.


It is the prospect of realigning this service (so that it makes more transportation sense) that leads me, at this time, not to simply urge that you make this service a part of the basic system, such a decision could lock the trains onto their present route. However, I and the residents of the Southern Tier counties of West Virginia would of course prefer a continuation of the present service to an outright discontinuance. I believe what I am suggesting here is a reasonable middle course.

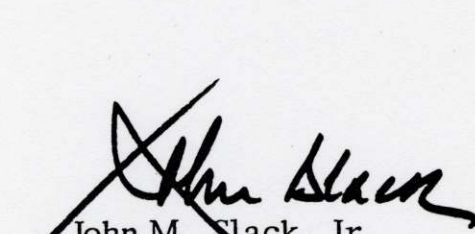
At any event, I believe it is essential, and that you have the leadership ability, to see to it that Amtrak understands its assignment, which is to design, operate, and market an experimental service in the hope and intention that it will succeed, not fail. To date, we have not had such an experiment.

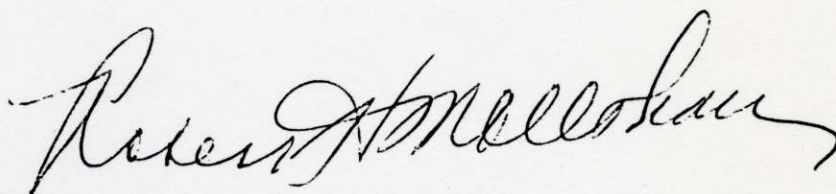
With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,


Harley O. Staggers
Member of Congress


Nick J. Rahall, II
Member of Congress


John M. Slack, Jr.
Member of Congress


Robert H. Mollohan
Member of Congress

NJR/peb

cc: Ross Capon